

It never occurred to me to ask, when we began looking for our first dog in 1968, how long I might expect my dog to live. All I knew was I wanted an Irish Wolfhound and I just presumed that all dogs had about the same lifespan. When our first wolfhound died very young of torsion, I began to understand this sole disadvantage of life with wolfhounds and also began to ask questions. I received many answers; the problem was, all of the answers were different, because everyone was guessing.

In 1986 I interviewed a veterinary oncologist at the University of Illinois for an article I was writing on bone cancer for the *Irish Wolfhound Quarterly*, for which I was then a regular columnist. To explain my interest in the subject, I mentioned that it was one of the major killers of Irish Wolfhounds. “Not even close,” he said. “Trauma is the number one killer of your breed.”

I knew that could not be the case, but who was I to argue with a top veterinary researcher at a major university? I, too, had only been guessing, but all of my data was anecdotal and he referred to the results of real, scientific inquiry. As it turned out, the data which he used came from major emergency clinics throughout the United States and so the numbers were naturally skewed towards trauma.

But that frustration led to this study. I just wanted to know the truth, or at least as close to the truth as I could get. I wanted my project to be as

scientifically irrefutable as possible and to that end, I enlisted the help of epidemiologists, population geneticists, statisticians and medical researchers in two major teaching hospitals (human) in St. Louis, Missouri. Additionally, I spoke with and was helped by several researchers and clinicians at both the University of Illinois and the University of Missouri Veterinary Schools.

I was persuaded to undertake this study because I was suspicious of guesswork and so I am especially careful not to engage in it myself. However, I am asked frequently how I think the results would differ if I were to do the study today. The only answer I can honestly give is that I think, but cannot prove, that we would see a much higher incidence of death due to heart disease. I say that not because I think we have more wolfhounds suffering from heart disease today, because I truly do not know if that is the case. But we are certainly testing our dogs more today, using more sophisticated diagnostic tools with the testing being conducted by more experienced clinicians.

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